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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: SEPARATISM NOT THE ROOT CAUSE OF INSTABILITY IN  
THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

Classified By: Pol Minister Counselor Alice Wells. Reasons: 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: While Moscow-based experts believe that the insurgencies in the various North Caucasus republics are different in nature, none think that separatism is their root cause. Experts tell us that while the insurgency in Dagestan may have a religious basis, violence in Ingushetiya and Kabardino-Balkariya reflects displeasure with the local government, the state of the local economy and heavy-handed tactics by police. Most believed that the insurgencies in each of the republics are not inter-related or centrally-coordinated, although there may be loose, informal contacts among the various groups across the Caucasus. The Kremlin may be closer to replacing Ingushetiya's President Zyazikov, but has to finalize a strategy to offset his clan's anticipated opposition. End summary.

#### North Caucasus Republics are Separate Cases

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¶2. (C) In a series of meetings the week of February 4-8 with several Moscow-based experts on the North Caucasus and representatives of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the Northern Caucasus (Coordination Center), all agreed that the insurgencies and violence that currently exist in each of the republics of the North Caucasus have different origins and should be considered distinct. Some commentators pointed to the complex clan politics of the region, which feeds off a tradition and culture of revenge, as an additional element in the equation. Aleksey Malashenko, an expert on the North Caucasus at the Moscow Carnegie Center, said that it is important to remember that the North Caucasus was never modernized during the Soviet period and that a huge difference exists even between the North Caucasus and the rest of Russia's southern federal region. He noted that except for three cities in Dagestan and perhaps the largest cities in each of the other republics, the remainder of the North Caucasus is mainly "traditional." According to Malashenko, corruption in the North Caucasus is worse than in the rest of Russia.

#### Economic Factors Dominate

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¶3. (C) Human Rights Watch researcher Tanya Lokshina, formerly with the NGO Demos, noted that Ingushetiya is second only to Dagestan in the level of unemployment among the North Caucasus republics. Malashenko believed that the actual level of unemployment in the North Caucasus is 70-80 percent, which includes 250,000 unemployed in Chechnya out of a population of one million. According to Malashenko, this is the lowest figure for any of the republics and is better than last year's rate in Chechnya. Malashenko warned of another problem, the emigration of the young and educated intelligentsia in search of work elsewhere in Russia or abroad, which means that the economic potential and quality

of society left in the North Caucasus will continue to deteriorate. He added that the huge number of uneducated, non-Russian speaking youth in the region has an explosive potential.

14. (C) Experts do not see any quick fixes to the economic challenges. The former mufti of Ingushetiya, Magomed Albogachiyev, now First Vice President of the Moscow-based Coordination Center, told us that 95 percent of Ingushetiya's budget comes from Moscow. Gregoriy Shvedov, a member of the board of the NGO Memorial and Deputy Editor of the internet-based newspaper Caucasian Knot, added that after the division of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic around the break-up of the Soviet Union, Ingushetiya was left without an industrial base. The Coordination Center's Executive Director Shafig Pshikhachev added that in his native Kabardino-Balkaria, the government publishes great looking statistics about the economy, but when you visit there it is another story. Pshikhachev lamented that Kabardino-Balkaria has an agrarian-based economy and that the people are poor, some earning as little as 3,000 rubles (about USD 120) per month.

#### Separatist Appeal Does Not

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15. (C) Separatist demands, however, are not seen as an important factor. Albogachiyev said that displeasure in North Caucasus has nothing to do with a desire for independence and is not anti-Russian; residents there simply want a better life. Sergey Markedonov, Head of the Inter-ethnic Relations Department at the Moscow Institute of Political and Military Analysis agreed. Both he and Lokshina believe that unlike Chechnya, the insurgency in Ingushetiya has never been separatist.

16. (C) According to Lokshina, the situation in Ingushetiya is about Zyazikov having no respect among the people, who are increasingly aware of the rampant corruption. She added that this is exacerbated by the level of violence in Ingushetiya which in the past 12 months has begun to resemble the "mopping up" exercises that had been carried out by federal and local troops in Chechnya. Lokshina added that the opposition in Ingushetiya is energized by the disappearance case of two members of the Aushev family, distant relatives of former Ingushetiya President Ruslan Aushev. After several hundred people rallied in September 2007 to protest their disappearance, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ingushetiya made a deal with his Chechen counterpart for their release. According to Lokshina, people in Ingushetiya now believe they can bring about change.

#### Religion Plays Greater Role in Dagestan

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17. (C) Most experts agreed that religion plays the greatest role in the insurgency in Dagestan. According to Shvedov, people in Dagestan tend to be more religious. Shvedov believed that while only 25 percent of residents of Ingushetiya are religiously active, the number in Dagestan is about 80 percent. Lokshina and Markedonov agreed with Shvedov that Dagestan has its own history of fundamentalism, with a home-grown Salafist movement in predominantly Sufi Dagestan dating back to the 1930's. Markedonov added that in the 1990's, proponents of "ethnic nationalism" in the North Caucasus began to use religion to convince the people to join their cause. According to him, the insurgency in Dagestan is fueled by Islamic scholars, religious extremists, criminals and unemployed youth who are susceptible to the money offered them by religious extremists.

18. (C) Despite the fact that Wahhabism is outlawed in Dagestan, recent police actions in the Dagestani village of Gimry uncovered Wahhabist caches of weapons and ammunition. Lokshina agreed that Dagestan has its own history of fundamentalism, but added that the police there are also very corrupt. She noted that the rate of killings of policemen in

Dagestan is the highest in Russia (although she said the situation is also deteriorating in Ingushetiya). Reflecting the difficulty in assessing the proximate cause of any conflict in the North Caucasus, Lokshina differed with Shvedov and argued that the situation in Gimry was caused by a corrupt local police chief rather than Islamic extremists.

#### Most Experts Think that Insurgencies are not Inter-related

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¶9. (C) Of the Moscow-based experts with whom we spoke, only the muftis from the Coordination Center believed that the conflict in the North Caucasus are inter-related. In addition, one regional Circassian activist told us (septel) of a loose network of informal contacts between the different groups. Former Ingushetiya mufti Albogachiyev believed the fighters are working together and have a good understanding of their common purpose. He said that they have set up self-styled Islamic emirates in five of the North Caucasus republics (Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, North Ossetiya and one for the combined republics of Karachay-Cherkessiya and Kabardino-Balkariya). None of the others believed this to be the case. Shvedov dismissed this notion as a "myth promoted by the Kremlin and sociologists." Shvedov also believed that although contacts with al-Qaida exist with some of the fighters, the day that al-Qaida can send instructions to militants in the North Caucasus is long gone. Malashenko did not believe that al-Qaida currently played a role in the North Caucasus, nor did he believe that there is any widespread Chechen influence in the region. He said there is a home-grown version of militant Islam in the region, particularly in Dagestan.

#### Wide Disparity in Quality of Leadership

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¶10. (C) The Moscow-based experts drew a distinction between the quality of the various leaders in the North Caucasus, with Chechnya's Kadyrov and Ingushetiya's Zyazikov at opposite ends of the spectrum. Albogachiyev recounted how, in his fight against corruption and attempt to build a better life in Chechnya, Kadyrov has been known to put on rubber boots and wade through drainage canals to see what should be done to improve them. According to Markedonov, Putin is dependent on Kadyrov's success to show that he has brought the situation in Chechnya under control, fulfilling a promise he made to the Russian people eight years ago. Markedonov believes Chechens no longer have any desire to leave the Russian Federation. Chechens have moved to Moscow and other

cities to find work and some have married ethnic Russians, thereby integrating Chechnya with Russia.

¶11. (C) Lokshina admitted that separatism in Chechnya is in a "deep slumber." According to her, the Kremlin's deal with Kadyrov is that as long as there are no blatantly violent acts against civilians by local police and troops, he has a free rein. Although now there is only sporadic fighting and no longer any large-scale military or police operations, Lokshina stated that Chechnya is far from a success story. She said there is a gloomy prognosis for Kadyrov's "managed civil society" because he has, in fact, wiped out civil society and any free local press there.

¶12. (C) Markedonov agreed that Kadyrov is extremely popular among Chechens, and while President Mustafa Batdyyev of Karachayevo-Cherkessiya currently has a low public popularity rating, even he is not as unpopular as Zyazikov. He added that while Chechens simply want Moscow to leave them alone, the Ingush want Moscow to help them, and the even the opposition there looks to Moscow to give the republic a new president. According to Markedonov, Zyazikov is viewed as an "occupier" by many in Ingushetiya, as he is from a weak clan and cannot control the situation. Neither Lokshina nor Malashenko, however, give much weight to recent attempts to discredit Zyazikov. Lokshina does not believe 80,000 people actually provided their names and passport information as part of the internet-based "I Did Not Vote" campaign.

Malashenko described the January 26 demonstrations to which, according to him, organizers lured participants with the promise of gifts, as "more like a disorganized street gang." Malashenko summarized that the problem is that under Yeltsin there were two qualities for a local president, you had to be favored by Moscow and acceptable to the local population; under Putin, you only needed to be approved by the Kremlin. Malashenko believed that the Kremlin does have someone in mind to replace Zyazikov in the near future -- Ingushetiya's recently elected (and only) current Duma member Bilan Khamchiyev.

¶13. (C) Aleksandr Machevskiy, an advisor on the North Caucasus in the Presidential Administration, confirmed to us separately February 5 that the Kremlin has candidates in mind to replace Zyazikov. The problem, according to Machevskiy, is that in addition to removing Zyazikov, you must also get rid of others entrenched in the government with him.

Comment:

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¶14. (C) These sorts of educated opinions on the North Caucasus are at odds with the picture the Kremlin has painted in the media, showing that the authorities are making progress in ensuring stability and paying adequate attention to regional economic development in the region. The gap is partly explained by the authorities' heightened sensitivity toward negative information coming from the region that could be viewed as destabilizing and not part of Putin's Plan. However it may also indicate a gap between reality on the ground and the Kremlin's perception, fueled by overly optimistic reports by regional leaders dependent on Moscow for their jobs and more concerned with currying favor with the Kremlin than dealing with difficult socio-economic and political problems in the region.

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